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ABSTRACT

This handbook is to assist agencies and schools in developing coalitions for Youth Engaged in Service, to build better citizens and healthier communities. Seven examples of the community building process are presented to demonstrate what others have tried. Highlighted communities include: (1) Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania; (2) New York, New York; (3) Columbia, South Carolina; (4) Leucadia, California; (5) Zuni, New Mexico; (6) Evansville, Indiana; and (7) Everett, Washington. A set of action principles helps in putting together resources to expand the classroom education into the community. (EH)

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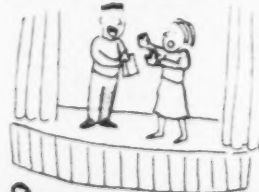
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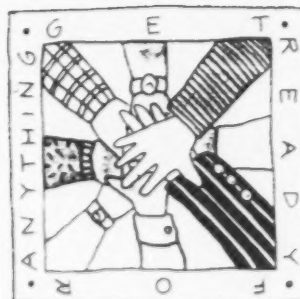
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What can happen when young people get together in their communities?

That's right, anything can happen.

When young people join together, they can

- Take Action
- Address Serious Social Problems
- Serve Their Communities and
- Help Themselves

The Points of Light Foundation presents a handbook for developing coalitions for Youth Engaged in Service – a winning process for building better citizens and healthier communities.

Introduction

Each of us has the ability to make a difference, but when we work together, our efforts are magnified. In communities across the country, young people are joining together to address serious social problems.

In Columbia, South Carolina, they are forming community service clubs as constructive alternatives to gangs. In Evansville, Indiana, they are developing innovative ways to take the anti-drug message to their peers. And in Zuni Pueblo in New Mexico, they have created a Youth Council, linked to the more senior Tribal Council, which has started environmental and other service programs. Everywhere, young people are taking an important role in revitalizing the life of our towns, our cities and our nation.

Young people, of course, aren't doing it alone. They are joining with adults - teachers and administrators in schools, business people, clergy, non-profit professionals, and members of the media. They are participating in coalitions and informal groups, gathering unique combinations of resources and perspectives - alliances that cut across race, social and age barriers and that contain the energy and experience necessary to confront our most pressing social problems.

These youth service initiatives not only help the people and communities served, but act to transform the young people serving. Through service, young people learn the values of self-reliance and compassion. They gain problem-solving and interpersonal skills. They discover the richness and diversity of their own community and learn they have the ability to make an important contribution. As one Colorado student said after a year of community service, "Now I'm ready for anything."

Schools and community-based organizations that support these service projects benefit too. Service initiatives provide schools with hands-on opportunities to link book learning to "real world" problems and to nurture well-rounded, civic-minded young people. Community-based groups tap into new sources of energy and support, while building important partnerships that increase their effectiveness. Community service projects help build vital communities, strengthening their institutions and challenging young people to take an active role in addressing their problems - now and in the future.

How to Use This Book

This handbook is meant to demonstrate a number of ways young people have teamed up to do the difficult work of addressing important community needs.

Seven examples of the community building process are presented to give you an idea of what others have tried.

A set of "action principles" will help guide you as you begin putting together your own coalition for Youth Engaged in Service.

Towards a More Hopeful Future

If we want to shape the future of our country, young people must start today. As the stories here relate, the good work has already begun. But it is only a beginning. We all must come together – in communities large and small – so that we can unleash the energy and idealism of our young people.

The strength of our democracy depends on the participation of all our citizens and on the collective vitality of our communities. Service is one of the building blocks toward a better, more dynamic life for all Americans. As the writer Maya Angelou has said, there "ain't nothin' to it, but to do it." So let's get to work.

The Very Best of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania



It was a sweet deal. In 1991, Nestle Chocolate, as part of its Very Best in Youth program, offered \$10,000 to the young people of Pittsburgh, where Nestle has its world headquarters. "They can do whatever they want with it," said Adair Sampogna, program administrator and director of Nestle's division of Public and Consumer Affairs.

While dismayed adults may have envisioned eighth graders hollering for a Madonna or Guns N Roses concert, the young people of Pittsburgh took a responsible, even sober approach to this opportunity. Gathered through the programs of Pittsburgh Board of Education, American Red Cross, Three Rivers Youth, Western PA Police Athletic League, the United Way's Volunteer Action Center and the Jewish Community Center, a core group of 12 young leaders decided to do a local needs assessment.

The group identified drug and alcohol abuse, teen suicide, and teen pregnancy as major community issues. Talking to experts in these areas, they decided that low self-esteem was the key component in each of these negative behaviors. The core group then received training from these experts and organized a conference for eighty middle and high school students - running workshops on various ways to build self-esteem.

Their work impressed the local school district and 4H office enough that members of the Very Best in Youth core committee now serve as advisers to these groups on youth education and activities. The results in Pittsburgh have encouraged Nestle to do more, expanding its Very Best in Youth Program to 10 cities across the country during the 1991-92 school year.



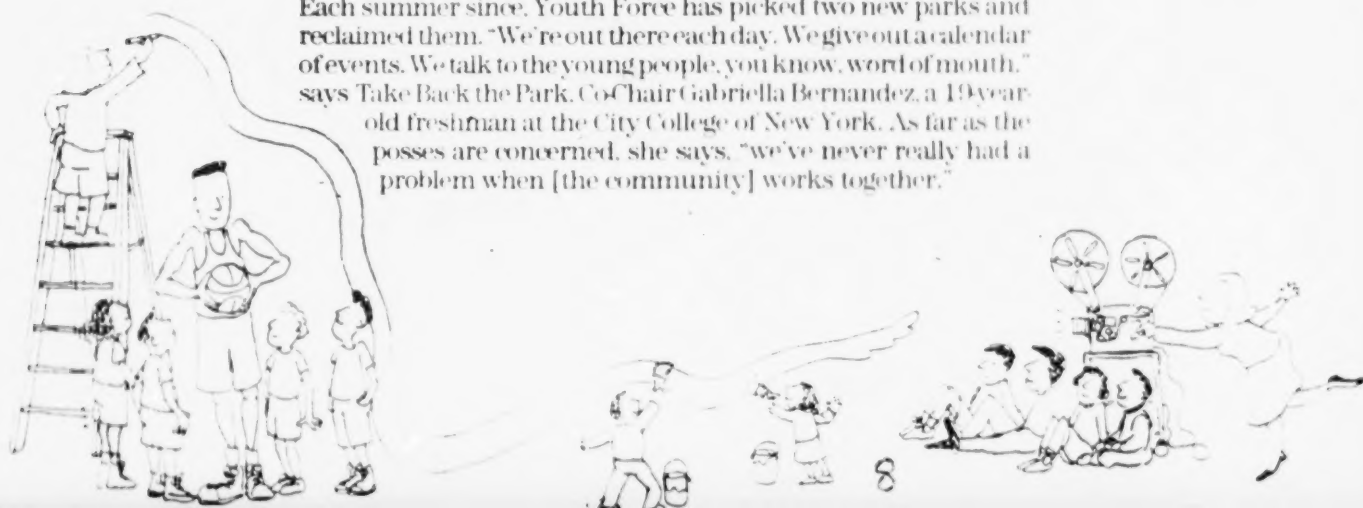
More Than Just A Walk in the Park New York, New York

New York City's playgrounds and parks are sanctuaries for young people, places to play away from traffic on the streets. Unfortunately, drug dealers and posses can occupy these same parks and make them unsafe for the whole community.

Back in 1987, Youth Force - a group of under 21-year-olds dedicated to empowering other young people to participate in the running of their schools, neighborhoods and city - decided they wanted to revitalize Putnam Park in Brooklyn and Chelsea Park in Manhattan - both of which were largely under used. They met with the local community boards, police precincts, and young people in the neighborhood and planned the Take Back the Park program.

That summer, Monday through Thursday, from 8 AM to 11 PM, Youth Force volunteers organized basketball tournaments, board games, mural painting projects, concerts and movies. When the evening was over, they would even walk the younger children home. Thanks to this non-stop programming and the cooperation of local police, the dealers and gangs didn't stick around.

Each summer since, Youth Force has picked two new parks and reclaimed them. "We're out there each day. We give out a calendar of events. We talk to the young people, you know, word of mouth," says Take Back the Park, Co-Chair Gabriella Bernandez, a 19-year-old freshman at the City College of New York. As far as the posses are concerned, she says, "we've never really had a problem when [the community] works together."



A Special Brand of Love Columbia, South Carolina

Responding to growing concern about teen violence around her city, Velma Love – then of the United Way and now the Executive Director of Big Brothers/Big Sisters of Columbia, South Carolina – joined with more than 20 youth-serving agencies from The Urban League to The Red Cross to search for solutions. Plans for a youth leadership program soon developed.

A “Youth Initiatives” demonstration project at three public housing developments in Columbia recruited groups of 10-12 young people, who in turn participated in a three-day retreat. They learned communication, planning, problem solving, and leadership skills, and talked about ways they might help their community. Then they took action. For example, the group at Hendley Homes called Teens Involved in Their Community:

- Created a safety and crime prevention patrol advised by local police;
- Organized a day-long neighborhood clean-up;
- Ran a Teen Pregnancy Awareness Campaign;
- Set up an Adopt-a-Grandparent program; and
- Mobilized a week-long fundraiser in area high schools, which gathered \$1,400 for local educational programs.

“These are regular kids doing noticeable things,” says Love. “We asked them, and they’ve responded. They’re demonstrating their concern.”



Class Act Leucadia, California

Educators agree: when parents are involved, children and schools benefit. At the start of the 1991 school year, Candice Porter approached Paul Ecke Elementary School principal Dr. Jere McInerney - hoping to enrich her son John's education and help out at the school. McInerney showed Porter a colorful package of posters, teacher guides, and activity worksheets from StarServe, a national organization that helps teachers and students get on their way to serving their community. "This is perfect," said Porter at the time.

Copying the package for interested teachers at the school, Porter then prepared a flyer in both Spanish and English inviting students to an after school meeting. Fifty-two young people and a handful of adults came. Together, they planned a food drive for Thanksgiving and a caroling trip to a local nursing home.

Students at Paul Ecke, just north of San Diego, have also pledged to do more. They've organized into several committees, each with a specific focus. Some youth are serving as "Study Buddies" to Kindergarten and First graders, others are gathering office and personal supplies for a local foster home, and a large group has begun work with San Diego State University to test nearby Los Penasquitos Lagoon for unhealthy levels of pollutants.

"The kids are jacked up," says Porter. "You can see their self-esteem growing in them. They're talking more assertively and in front of large groups. They're totally involved."



Rediscovering The Traditional Zuni, New Mexico



Each summer in Zuni Pueblo, southeast of Albuquerque, junior and senior high school students join together with students from around the country for a series of action-oriented leadership retreats. These programs – sponsored by the National Indian Youth Leadership Project (NIYLP) – challenge youth to serve, emphasizing “traditional Native American values for the 1990’s” including the importance of family, service to others, and spiritual awareness.

Last fall, 40 Zuni students returned from their retreat with a special energy – “something shining, like gold, but better” as the NIYLP likes to describe the spirit. Committed to cleaning up their local environment, they have organized a recycling project and helped the Bureau of Land Management conduct an in-depth field study of soil erosion problems in the area.

Zuni High School students have also initiated plans to form a Youth Council to provide an ongoing forum to discuss many of the same issues that confront their elders in the community’s Tribal Council. “Traditionally, in Native American communities, leadership is with the older folks,” notes McClellan Hall, Director of NIYLP. “The plans for the Youth Council recognize the need to get young people involved.”



Peer Pressure Evansville, Indiana

What's the most effective way to bring an antidrug message to young people? In 1990, Evansville decided, "Why not ask the young people themselves?" The results have been exciting.

Castle Junior High School students formed a puppet troupe called TADA, Teens Against Drugs and Alcohol. Five students wrote a series of drug prevention plays, and the troupe gave 99 performances last year at local schools, churches and community groups.

Young people at the New Hope Baptist Church have received education and training so they can now act as peer counselors for potential drug and alcohol abusers.

Fifth graders at Brumfield Elementary school decided they should learn Drug Refusal skills from local police officers and then did skits to teach what they learned to younger students.

These and dozens of other drug and alcohol prevention ideas are all youth-generated. Eight to eighteen-year-olds apply for annual mini-grants administered by a community Teen Advisory Council, using a grant from the National Crime Prevention Council's Teens As Resources Against Drugs program. Last year, more than 1,000 young people participated in projects, creating a positive new meaning for the phrase "peer pressure."



Out Of Their Cocoon Everett, Washington



Cocoon House, a shelter for homeless teens, had just opened when members of the Volunteer Committee from nearby Mariner High School dropped by to see if they could help. "[The shelter] needed a way to tell kids that it was there and it was safe," said Kurt Yanagimachi, a 17-year-old senior.

Working with Cocoon House staff, the group decided it would write and produce a promotional video that could be used by school counselors and community workers. Local Viacom Cable Company came forward, trained the young people, and provided film and equipment. The video has already been distributed to local agencies and schools.

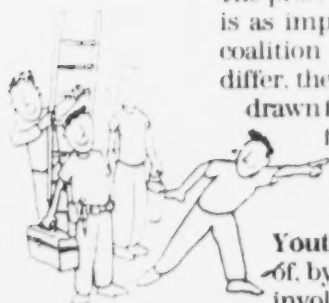
"Before I went to work on the project," says Yanagimachi, "I didn't know much about the surrounding community. We're pretty protected. Now I'm thinking about doing more."

The Volunteer Committee at Mariner High School is just one of more than 14 groups of young people at area high schools participating in the Snohomish County Youth Initiative (SCYI). Run in collaboration with the Washington Leadership Institute and the local United Way, and with support from Viacom and other local businesses, SCYI sponsors trainings, retreats, and workshops — all designed to help young people take action on community problems they identify themselves.



Action Principles for Building A Coalition for Youth Engaged In Service

The process of creating a coalition for Youth Engaged in Service is as important as the youth service opportunities that the coalition provides. While the needs of each community will differ, there are a number of common "action principles" we've drawn from successful collaborations that can help set the tone for your work.



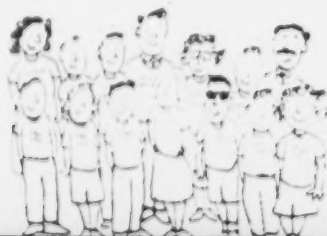
Getting Started

Youth Must Lead. The coalition-building process must be of, by, and for young people. Youth should be integrally involved in the planning, goal setting, and implementation of any project designed.

Adults Are Important, Too. While coalitions should be youth-driven, they should have support and guidance from adults. Adults can provide mentoring and access to resources. They are also critical to helping maintain programs after the current group of young people have grown up. Adults, however, should acknowledge their influence and power over young people and take meaningful steps to put decision-making power in the hands of youth.



Get Everyone Involved Early. Your coalition should encourage racial, ethnic, gender and other forms of diversity. Representatives from the nonprofit, education, business, media and religious sectors should also be part of your effort. Make sure your coalition is diverse before you start. Bringing people into the circle after the work begins prevents them from feeling full ownership of the project.



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Getting to Work

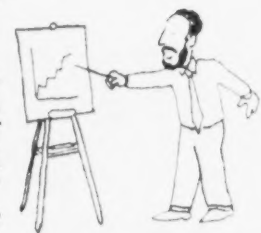


Lead with Your Needs. Your coalition should address serious issues identified by young people and the community at large. A formal or informal community needs assessment should be one of the first pieces of any coalition's work.

Who Else Can Help? Forming a diverse coalition is not enough. Utilize diversity. What outside resources can the people at the table bring to your work?

Begin at the End. With your needs assessment in hand, set qualitative and quantitative goals for your work (e.g., "Our coalition will change the negative perceptions of young people in our community" or "Our coalition will involve x number of young people in the first year." These will help you focus your work and evaluate your program later.

Be Creative. With needs and goals defined, your coalition should devise an innovative set of community service strategies and initiatives.





And While You're At It, Remember...

Have Fun. Just because you're addressing serious social problems, doesn't mean you have to be grim. Take a smile to your coalition and to your projects. The more exciting and upbeat the work, the more people will join in.

Think Long-Term. Your coalition should seek to create new opportunities for young people today, while at the same time facilitating an ongoing commitment to promoting youth service in the community.

Don't Wait. Don't Rush. Given the problems in our communities, we can't afford to wait or rush. Making sure all groups in the community are represented up front, identifying community needs, building consensus around an action plan, developing enduring partnerships – these things require sensitivity and cannot be done easily or quickly. Act now, but respect the process and the people in your community.



Building a coalition for Youth Engaged in Service can be just another program designed by adults to tell young people what to do, or a rare opportunity for young people and adults to work together constructively. It can be a chance for young people to test their leadership potential and a chance for adults to teach young people about the history and life of their community.

By bringing a wide variety of participants together, a coalition for Youth Engaged in Service can also create a model for community-based problem solving that can address a whole range of problems and perhaps transform the public life of our villages, towns and cities.



For more information about how you can create a coalition for
Youth Engaged in Service in your community, contact:

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